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VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

DEPARTMENT OF CERAMICS

AN EXHIBITION OF WEDGWOOD WARE

held in commemoration
of the Bicentenary of the birth of
Josiah Wedgwood

1730—1795

1930

Josiah Wedgwood.

Chronological Summary.

1730.	Born at Burslem in Staffordshire.
1744.	Apprenticed to his brother Thomas.
1750–1.	Partnership with Harrison and Alders.
1754–9.	Partnership with Thomas Whieldon at Fenton.
1759.	Wedgwood began as an independent potter at Ivy House, Burslem.
1762.	First meeting with Thomas Bentley.
1764.	Brick House Works taken over.
1769.	Entered into partnership with Bentley. Etruria Works built and opened on June 13th of this year. Black basaltes perfected and used for Etruscan vases.
1774.	Jasper ware invented.
1775.	John Flaxman first employed.
1780.	Death of Bentley.
1783.	Elected a fellow of the Royal Society.
1790.	The first satisfactory "Portland Vase" made.
1795.	Death of Wedgwood (January 3rd).

Earliest Productions (from about 1754).

(Wall-case G).

During his partnership with Whieldon, Wedgwood continued the manufacture of the prevailing Staffordshire wares (such as the "solid agate" ware represented by the teapot on the second shelf). The green glaze invented by Wedgwood shortly before severing his partnership with Whieldon, in 1759, is seen on several pieces. Block moulds in salt-glaze ware for pine-apple and cauliflower ware.

Cream-coloured Ware (from about 1759).

(Wall-cases I, J; Floor-cases 1 & 2 and adjacent pedestal).

Wedgwood's perfected cream-colour ("Queen's ware") is seen in table wares with various forms of decoration; moulding and piercing; painting of simple borders in enamels; transfer printing (the wares were sent for printing to Liverpool).

Earliest Wares in Classical Style (from about 1762).

(Wall-cases H & I).

Wedgwood became inspired with a desire to imitate classical forms soon after his first contact with his subsequent partner, Thomas Bentley, and the first experiments in this direction, such

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as the three-handled vase in Case I, were carried out in the usual cream-coloured and agate bodies, the former decorated with marbled or mottled glazes, or with coloured clays. Oil gilding was generally added. For these and other ornamental wares he built in 1768–9 the works to which he gave the significant name Etruria.

Black Basaltes (from about 1768).

(Floor-case 3; Wall-cases C, D, E & F).

Wedgwood's experiments to produce a material more suitable for ornamental wares than the ordinary cream-coloured body resulted in the invention of a hard black stoneware to which he gave the name "basaltes" (also sometimes called Egyptian black). This was at first often decorated in the so-called "encaustic" style with enamel colours in imitation of Greek vases ("Etruscan ware"). Such were the first six vases fired at Etruria, thrown by Wedgwood himself on 13th June, 1769 (one exhibited in Case 3). Busts in black basaltes for library decoration are exhibited above the wall-cases.

Jasper Ware (from about 1774–5).

(Floor-cases 4, 5, 6 & 7).

Further experiments towards a fine body for ornamental wares resulted in the discovery of Wedgwood's "jasper ware"—a white stoneware capable of being stained with metallic oxides to various colours, of which blue was the most popular (floor-cases 4 & 5). Examples of sage-green, lilac and black are in floor-cases 6 & 7. In most cases the decoration was in relief in white on a coloured ground, but in rare cases the process is reversed.

Wedgwood's Copy of the Portland Vase (1790).

(Wall-case L).

In 1786 the famous Roman cameo glass vase belonging to the Duke of Portland was lent to Wedgwood for copying in jasper ware. Part of the plaster mould taken from the original is shown on the bottom shelf; on the second shelf are (1) a wax cast of one of the reliefs (2) the mould in white biscuit ware, taken from this (3) one of the earliest experimental vases showing the difficulties experienced by Wedgwood in securing the adhesion of the reliefs. Top shelf, one of the first successful copies of the vase, given by Wedgwood to Dr. Erasmus Darwin and afterwards in the possession of their grandson, Charles Darwin.

Cane-coloured Ware (from about 1779).

(Floor-case 6).

Another of the bodies invented by Wedgwood was a cane-coloured material prepared from the marl found in Staffordshire. It was used for ornamental and table wares, and was generally decorated in relief, sometimes with a red material which when used by itself was known as "Rosso Antico."

Medallions and Decorative Panels.

Floor-case 7; Wall-cases K, M, N & O; Screens.

Wedgwood employed various artists, of whom the most important were John Flaxman and William Hackwood, to copy and adapt reliefs from the antique, and to model portraits of famous men and women. Many of the larger plaques were intended for inlaying in mantelpieces and furniture; the smaller for tea-caddies, boxes, etc.

Miscellaneous.

(Desk-case).

Here are exhibited various documents relating to Wedgwood's activities; the earliest pattern-book for enamelling; wax reliefs and moulds; various trial pieces; cameos and intaglios for rings and seals.

The Exhibition includes loans from H.M. the King, Herbert Allen, Esq., Miss L. Antrobus, Mrs. David Davis, Mrs. L. G. Drummond, John A. Tulk, Esq., the City of Birmingham Art Gallery, the Etruria Museum (Messrs. Josiah Wedgwood & Co., Ltd.), the Hanley Museum, the Lady Lever Art Gallery (Port Sunlight), the Nottingham Castle Museum, the Wedgwood Institute (Burslem).

Further examples of Wedgwood ware may be seen in Room 139 (Schreiber Collection).